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Spying Held Necessary for Policy

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HEDGESVILLE — Clandestine activities by the nation's intelligence gathering agencies is a necessary tool in the development of foreign policy for the United States, a representative of the U.S. State Department said last night.

But intelligence gathering isn't always secret, said Donald MacDonald, who works for the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in Washington, D.C.

MacDonald opened a four-part series of seminars on foreign affairs at James Rumsey Vocational-Technical Center. The seminars are sponsored by the Berkeley County Schools Adult and Community Education Office in conjunction with the Department of State.

"Effective foreign policy depends on the best possible information, understanding and judgment of those held responsible for making it," MacDonald said.

Intelligence gatherers provide the raw materials that are the foundation for foreign policy decisions, he said, and there is a wide and often open exchange of information between nations.

Americans raise a fuss about secrecy of intelligence agencies like the CIA, said MacDonald, because "it's human nature to suspect that what we don't know or understand."

But secrecy is crucial to the effectiveness of intelligence gathering techniques and sources, he said. Revelation of confidential information can be damaging, and in cases where people are involved, fatal, he added.

Former intelligence agents like Philip Agee, who write books detailing confidential information after leaving the intelligence service, hurt American policy, he said.

Journalists can do the same thing, he said, citing as an example a recent column by Jack Anderson that said strategic strike targets in the case of nuclear war included 100 sites in China.

"That kind of thing does nobody any real service, and it gives a lot of us in the Department of State a real hard time," said MacDonald. But the press plays an important role in development of foreign policy, MacDonald said.

"The first thing I do every day is read the New York Times," he said. "Journalists may have equipment than we do in some areas and better sources in some cases," he said.

But the press plays an important role in increasing public awareness and involvement in foreign policy development, he said.

Vietnam and Watergate spawned widespread distrust of the government and demands for wider involvement of the people, MacDonald said.

In the intelligence field, that demand manifested itself in the direct involvement of Congress through the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, MacDonald.

"I'd like to see an attitude here closer to Britain's," MacDonald said. "They are willing to allow their leaders to do the job within somewhat larger limits than we are. The U.S. government is on such a tight string, it becomes hard to have a foreign policy."

While the former college professor talked mainly about intelligence operations, questions from the people at the session focused on America's defenses; is the nation strong enough?

"I think we have a pretty darn good military force and when the time comes, they'll be there," said MacDonald.

"It is long past time that we see the defense budgets increase," he said, adding. "Any country without the force to back up legitimate interests is going to have a hard time and that includes the United States." Part of the strength of this country is its unpredictability, said MacDonald, no nation can be sure how the United States will react.

MacDonald's job with the state department is as a special assistant to the deputy assistant secretary for coordination.

Next Tuesday, the second seminar will feature Jerry Hamilton, a specialist on the Soviet Union. The seminar will be from 7 to 9 p.m. at the James Rumsey Vo-Tech Center.

Anyone may go to the session. Participants need not have attended the first to join any of the other three sessions.